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INTERVENTO DELLA SANTA SEDE ALLA 48a CONFERENZA INTERNAZIONALE SULL'EDUCAZIONE DELL'UNESCO

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Pubblichiamo di seguito l'intervento che l'Arcivescovo S.E. Mons. Silvano M. Tomasi, Osservatore Permanente presso l'Ufficio delle Nazioni Unite ed Istituzioni Specializzate a Ginevra, ha pronunciato il 26 novembre scorso, alla 48ma Conferenza Internazionale sull'Educazione promossa dall'UNESCO:

• INTERVENTO DI S.E. MONS. SILVANO M. TOMASI

Mr. President,

1. The Delegation of the Holy See fully subscribes to the theme of this *48th International Conference on Education* that a way to a future of peaceful coexistence, of mutual respect and enrichment by sharing the gifts of different cultures and traditions, comes through 'education of all'. Such an education takes into account the needs of every person and in particular the needs of the poor and most vulnerable, of people with disabilities, of rural and of city slums youth, of young people and adults without any discrimination.

A truly *inclusive society* calls for an equally *inclusive education*. The approach advocated responds to the expectations of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (udhr), whose *60th Anniversary* we celebrate these days, that states: "Everyone has the right to education ... Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups, and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace. Parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children" (art. 26).

Mr. President,

Children and youth bear carry with them a variety of learning needs. Moreover, in several geographical regions, for example, girls and women, demand specific policies and effective plans for their equal opportunities and social inclusion. States in particular are called upon to respond to the task of inclusiveness and they find clear

indications in the existing international normative framework regarding principles to implement and goals to reach. In other words, all Nations of the world and their specialized agencies must engage in "the *integral development* of the *human being*, economic and social progress and development of all peoples"¹. All Nations are called to recognize "that the human person is the central subject of the development process and that development policy should therefore make the human being the main participant and beneficiary of development"². This kind of 'human' and 'integral' approach should inform the policies and plans directed to achieve the *second* of the *Millennium Development Goals*: universal primary education (III, 19). Much progress has been made. In sub-Saharan Africa, however, about 38 million children of primary school age in this region are still out of school. Around the globe, in most refugees camps and in detention centers the education of children and youth remains quite inadequate. The *Report of the World Commission on Culture and Development*: "Our Creative Diversity", continues to ring true: "in an unequal world, the challenges of education for victimized or under-privileged children call for flexible approaches. Education should reach the unreached, and include the excluded"³.

2. The road of inclusiveness favours development particularly today. While a knowledge-based economy gives access to decent employment, it is even more important to promote social cohesion, mutual acceptance and appreciation of diversity. The Delegation of the Holy See shares an *inclusive approach* to education since it does not "reduce culture to a subsidiary position as a mere promoter of economic growth"⁴ but opens the person to others and to all the inner aspirations of the *human heart*. "Development divorced from its human or cultural context is development without a soul"⁵.

The *Declaration on Christian Education* of Vatican Council II states: "All men of every race, condition and age, since they enjoy the dignity of a human being, have an inalienable right to an education that is in keeping with their ultimate goal, their ability, their sex, and the culture and tradition of their country, and also in harmony with their fraternal association with other peoples in the fostering of true unity and peace on earth"⁶. In the practice of the Catholic Church this inclusive approach is translated into thousands of schools, universities and other educational institutions present in remote rural areas as well as in urban centers.

3. Inclusion works through the promotion of a society that respects the dignity of every human person and goes beyond criteria of efficiency. The present financial crisis is a concrete lesson: only the person that conceives relations with others beyond criteria of productivity and control can value reality in a balanced perspective and assume appropriate responsibility. This type of education is able to help forming individuals and new generations to social participation, to solidarity, to overcoming exclusion and to critically understand reality. At the same time an inclusive education involves a plurality of educational agencies and actors, all guided by the *principle of subsidiarity* that generates a synergy among family, teachers, professors and educators, young people themselves, non-governmental organizations, churches and religious communities and other persons that, in different ways, contribute to the formative process. While a more humane and inclusive society should care for the most vulnerable – and attention in educational policies to the right of the child is a significant aspect of this principle – school should constitute an environment in which educators could answer to the affective and cognitive needs of the child, not only in transmitting information, but also in being relevant for the children in this delicate phase of their lives. Then, educators should remain aware that they carry out their service in cooperation with *parents*, who are the first 'educational agency' and have the priority right and duty to educate their children. This convergence of efforts is an evident application of the basic *principle of subsidiarity*.

4. Another central goal of any educational policy should consist in thinking and organising the school as an environment in which positive relationships are practiced among the various members of the school's community. This *educational community* is called to promote a school that is a place of integral formation through inter-personal relations based on mutual respect and acceptance. In this perspective, inclusion is not an ideology that wears down all differences and loses sight of the situation of the concrete person, of her history and experiences, and that should remain at the center of every educational programme. Recently His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI observed: "Every true teacher knows that if he is to educate he must give a part of himself, and that it is only in this way that he can help his pupils overcome selfishness and become in their turn capable of authentic love. In a small child there is already a strong desire to know and to understand, which is expressed in his stream of questions and constant demands for explanations. Therefore, an education would be most impoverished if it were limited to providing notions and information and neglected the important question about

the truth, especially that truth which can be a guide in life"⁷. Inclusive education finds in this way another important dimension that favours dialogue between persons, peoples and culture in their "creative diversity".

5. In conclusion, Mr. President, an inclusive education embraces all children and youth in their existential context and all persons dedicated to their formation, a comprehensive process that combines transmission of knowledge and *development of personality*. In fact, the fundamental questions any person asks deal with the search for *meaning*, of life and history, of change and dissolution, of love and transcendence. At its best, education provides everyone with the tools to contribute a creative participation in community, to reflect and give an appropriate answer to the unavoidable profound questions of meaning, to live with others, to discover one's nature and inherent dignity as *spiritual creatures*.

1 Un General Assembly, 1986 *Declaration on the Right to Development*, Resolution 41/128, pp 5.

2 *Idem supra* note 1, pp 13.

3 Report of the World Commission on Culture and Development: "Our Creative Diversity", unesco, cti-96/ws-6, 1996, p. 32.

4 *Idem supra* note 3, p. 14.

5 *Idem supra* note 3, p. 48.

6 Vatican Council II, Declaration on Christian Education, *Gravissimum educationis*, 1965, 1, .

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7Benedict XVI, *Letter to the faithful of the Diocese and City of Rome on the urgent task of educating young people*, 21 January 2008, .
